

Enterprise Systems Engagement in Chinese SMEs: Exploring the relationship between users and technology providers through actor network theory

Abstract

Enterprise systems (ES) are an important element in raising firms' productivity. The main literature on ES is dominated by survey based research on large Western firm. The typical focus is on the user firm and how the implementation of ES technology has impacted operations from a before-and-after perspective. Analyses using critical success factors and technology adoption theories feature widely. Despite its global manufacturing importance China based research on ES is relatively limited and mirrors western based approaches. In contrast, this research examines ES engagement in Chinese SMEs from a process perspective through four case studies. It argues that ES adoption and implementation is a complex process that involves multiple stakeholders, and exploring the interplay among them explains why and how an ES is adopted and implemented. Actor-network theory (ANT) informs the main analysis and importantly both user and technology provider perspectives are examined. In particular the interplay between users and providers are tracked over time to provide a process based analysis which we argue better reflects the social reality of implementation of new technologies in small firms. The findings challenge the dominant user-centred theories of adoption and the role of informal networks in decision making.

Keywords: Enterprise systems; SMEs; case study; China; actor network theory.